Charlotte Perkins Gilman:

The Woman and Her Writings

by

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Charlotte Perkins Gilman, known as "The Militant Madonna" lived from 1860 to 1935. She was a woman who gave the impression of a quiet soul, but whose writings have the force of a closely argued pamphlet of socio-political issues.[1]

Charlotte was the transitional type who stood between the turn of the century Victorian era and the post W.W.I Flapper age. While she was the intellectual and theoretician of the Women's Movement of the first two decades of the 20th Century, she played only a minimal role in the actual political movement for women's rights. She preferred the label of humanist and sociologist, such as Margaret Mead, Simone de Beauvoir and Ashley Montagu, who were to follow, rather than that of feminist and intellectualist. Gilman shared the characteristics of the Enlightenment Feminists in that she was an intensively private person rather than a reforming activist.

One is humbled by reading Gilman's far-ranging ideas and their implications. A review of her writings leaves one with a realization that she is more contemporary than had previously been judged.

Gilman's analysis of American society was lucid, her intelligence extraordinary, her perceptions devastating. Modern societies have developed subtle ways to eliminate their messengers of bad tidings. Fame, the plagiarism and dilution of her ideas, then obscurity was the fate of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.[2]

Her fame went from the popularity of her most noted and quoted work, Women and Economics written in 1899 and subsequently translated into seven languages, to the obscurity of merely being men-

tioned in chronologies, text books and reference lists of the 1960's and '70's. Thanks to the current women's movement, an interest and examination of the historical, sociological, psychological and physiological subjugation of women has re-opened the treasure of wisdom that is to be found in Gilman's writings and life.

Like the other visionaries and radicals of her era (Emma Goldman, Anna Louise Strong, Suzanne LaFolette), Gilman was maligned, ridiculed and discredited by her contemporaries. She was popular in western Europe long before she was begrudgingly accounted some fame in the United States.

Today, one reads and hears Charlotte's work more in the context of sociology, labor reform, basic human rights and women's history, rather than amongst the nabobs of the literati.

To learn of Gilman's life is to see American society as an integrated system in which many of the changes advocated in politics and economics, cannot come about without changing the basic institutions of American life - home, marriage, child rearing.

She was born on July 3, 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut. Her mother was Mary Fitch Westcott of a renown lineage from Providence, Rhode Island. As a young adult, Charlotte lovingly dubbed her mother, Mary Fred. Frederick Beecher Perkins, grandson of the Unitarian divine and minister, Lyman Beecher, was her father. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, Catherine Beecher, warmly remembered for the establishment of schools for women, and Elizabeth Beecher Hooker, a strong proponent of women's suffrage, were her aunts. One would suppose that such illustrious ancestry would be intimidating or motivating to a person. While

Charlotte was aware of her impressive relatives, she didn't allow such family connections to hasten or hinder her individualistic path through life.

Charlotte's young years were hardly those of the pampered child of an upper middle class family. When she was seven, her father left the family. She remembered him only, with much affection, as an occasional visitor. He apparently had little interest in the development of his children (Charlotte and her brother, Thomas).

It had been observed by Gilman in her autobiography,[3] that perhaps Frederick Beecher Perkins' initial reason for departure from his family was a quasi-birth control method of the pre-Sanger era. Whatever the reasons, Charlotte's father infrequently floated in and out of her life. Reproach and rancor were never part of their relationship. While dominated by her mother, Gilman constantly sought communion and approval from her father.

Gilman often saw her mother completely without funds or hope of support in the near future. When their debts piled up and their credit ran out, they took the inevitable step for renewed liquidity - they moved. They moved 18 times in 14 years; most of the time from one city to another. It was a life of hand-me-down clothes, boardinghouses, rented rooms, indefinite stays with relatives and railroad journeys. They were not poor in the same way that the women who worked 14 hours a day in the textile mills of Providence were poor. They would have never been allowed to starve or wear rags on their feet in winter, or to die of disease because they couldn't afford a doctor. But Charlotte's deserted mother was

unable to provide security for her children; they had no fixed place of residence, little continuity in schooling or friends, no known resources to ward off unknown disasters of the future. Charlotte Perkins and her family were not just poor, they were "poor relation" - a situation that is as much social as it is economic.

Mrs. Perkins was hounded by debt. Consequently she could never make a life for herself. At first she took her children to live with her husband's parents, then her parents, then with aunts and relatives. Charlotte described her mother's life as "one of the most painfully thwarted I have ever known . . . After her flood of lovers, she became a deserted wife." Mrs. Perkins loved her husband until her death, and could never accept that her husband had rejected her. She tried to prevent her children from knowing similar pain.

In what can only be termed a misguided sense of parental protection, Mrs. Perkins tried to prevent her children from craving affection and tenderness by denying them any. She never permitted any signs of physical affection or tenderness between herself and her children. When Charlotte realized that her mother sometimes cuddled her and her brother, while they were asleep, she tried to keep herself awake by sticking pins in her arms so that she could experience the joy of her mother's love.[4]

It would be too simplistic to deduce that Charlotte's emotionally deprived childhood was responsible for her radicalism, inability to accept sterotypical roles and her eventual nervous collapse. Some commentators have stated that she was incapable

of sustaining interpersonal relationships. Actually she enjoyed devoted and lengthy friendships with Grace Ellery Channing and Helen Campbell. Despite desertion and divorce, she maintained a loving respect for her father and later for the husband she divorced, - Charles Stetson. Her marriage to her first cousin, George Houghton Gilman was a warm, companionable and loving liaison. Despite the social wags of the day labeling her an unfit mother, Charlotte and Katherine Beecher Stetson enjoyed a mother-daughter relationship that would be the envy of most parents. As a child and young woman, she worked very hard at household chores under the ever-present eye of her mother.

Charlotte's mental breakdown as a young mother was not due to a weak mind either. As a teenager she had perfected self-discipline to the point of Stoicism. Rather than indulge in the fashionable vogues of her age, Charlotte had no vanity about her looks, but she did admit that she was vain about her physical condition. At a time when fainting was considered the badge of femininity (oftentimes brought on by too tight a corset and constrictive clothing) Gilman ran a mile twice a week, learned gymnastics, and wore clothing as light and as loose as possible.

Her formal schooling consisted of four years spread out over seven institutions. For her, school was just another life game, an environment to be tested and experimented with. The neglect of Gilman's education was due to her sex, not to the family's poverty. When her brother Thomas was sixteen, the Beecher family sent him to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Years later Charlotte was successful in obtaining a limited financial backing

to enter the Rhode Island School of Design, a few blocks from her then home, in Providence. There she studied painting. Later, she earned her first income as a painter of still-life miniatures.

The relationship with the Beecher family was always problematic and tenuous. After 13 years of desertion, Mrs. Perkins finally divorced her husband whom she still greatly loved. Her chief reason was to enable him, if he wished, to remarry. She wanted him happy. The Beecher family was bitter. Regardless of the expansive sentiments and humanitarian ideas that the Beechers put forth from the pulpit, they were no different from the rest of Bourgeois America in their respect for money and their mania for surface conventionality. Good families simply did not have divorce in the 19th century. So Gilman learned the hard lesson that woman as victim can claim respectability; but woman who asserts herself loses social legitimacy.[5] Charlotte saw beyond the class mythology of woman's role to the economic reality. Later, that gave her the perspective to analyze all women as a service class.

Following the birth of her only child, Katherine, to Charles Stetson and herself, Charlotte plunged into a severe and prolonged post-partum depression. Inertia, exhaustion (both mental and physical), guilt, reproach societal and familial pressures wracked the mind and body of the formerly strong-willed and strong-bodied young woman. She loved her devoted, overprotective husband, who ministered to her and the child without complaint or regret. Her daughter was an excellent and well-behaved child. Yet, Charlotte could not bring herself from the depths of her depression. This landmark in her life is discussed in this writer's review of The

Yellow Wallpaper.

Gilman fled the Philadelphia doctor who had prescribed the "rest cure," and made arrangements for the care of her husband and child and went to visit friends in California. There she recovered her physical prowess and most of her mental faculties. The torment and weakness of that breakdown and the exhaustion of her mentality were evident in varying degrees until nearly her sixtieth year.

When she felt recovered, Charlotte returned to her devoted husband and daughter only to be vexed with relapses of her melancholia and exhaustion. She decided that she couldn't bear life as a wife. She separated from her husband and returned to California - this time with her beloved three-year old daughter. She remained on very friendly terms with her estranged husband. Several attempts at reconciliation failed.

In 1893, Gilman's mother, whom she had nursed during her final illness, died. The following year, Charles Stetson's divorce was final and he immediately remarried. His new wife was Grace Ellery Channing, Charlotte's life-long friend. The continued friendship of the threesome was incomprehensible to the society of that day. Hatred, jealousy, revenge would have been better accepted.

Since Gilman did not believe that her daughter should be deprived of a father the same way she had been, she arranged for Katherine to journey from California to New York in the company of her grandfather, and live for an indeterminate length of time with Stetson and his new wife, whom Katherine had known all her life and loved. It was said that she was a " . . . woman who had given up her child" - an act of moral degeneracy that had no equal in the 19th

century.[6] This act of considerate selfless love earned Charlotte even more notoriety than her divorce. It mattered not that the daughter was very happy, well-adjusted and surrounded by the love of her two mothers and her father. Charlotte states in her biography that she was prevented from delivering a scheduled talk on motherhood because of the alleged abdication of her motherly duty.

With the death of her mother, her divorce and the departure of her child, Gilman closed out the first part of her life. She was 35 years old and it was 1895. From then to 1900, she lived in no fixed place, traveling across the country lecturing in different cities.

Charlotte's reputation as a speaker was enhanced by her handsome lithe figure with black eyes. She was persuasive. Her highly rationalistic and somewhat self-righteous manner was tempered by a view of ironic humor, the ability to laugh at herself, and a gift for répartée.

Her religious convictions, which she described in her autobiography, are those of a deist with no concern for immortality or salvation. Politically she aligned herself with the Socialists, Fabians and the Women's Peace Party. However, she was too uncompromising a person to be an organizational leader and such activities were always subordinate to her writing and speaking.

In 1889, she published Women and Economics,[7] a persuasive feminist manifesto upon which her reputation primarily rests.

When she addressed the International Council of Women in London in 1899 and in Berlin in 1904, she was hailed as the author of "the most significant utterance on the subject since Mill's

Subjugation of Women." She also addressed the International Suffrage Conference in Budapest in 1913.

By the 1920's, as the fervor of the feminist movement receded, she lost much of her audience, though she still wrote occasional articles and lectured on topics such as: "Our Brains and What Ails 'Em," "Motherhood," "Our Children, Our Lives." The increasing emphasis on sex in the decade after W.W.I seemed to her only to increase woman's sexuoeconomic bondage to men, and one of her frequently delivered lectures in this period was "The Falsity of Freud."

In January, 1932, Gilman discovered that she had breast cancer. Ever the rationalist, she resolved not to be incapacitated or to become a burden to her husband and purchased and laid away sufficient chloroform to end her life. Various treatments failed to arrest the disease, although for three years she was able to continue her activity.

George Houghton Gilman, whom she had married in 1900, died suddenly in 1934. She moved to Pasadena to live with her daughter's family.

On August 17, 1935, she wrote a note which read in part:

> . . . Human life consists in mutual service. No grief, pain, misfortune or "broken heart" is excuse for cutting off one's life while any power of service remains. But when all usefulness is over, when one is assured of unavoidable and imminent death, it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one[8] . . . I have preferred chloroform to cancer.

She was 75 years old.

Since we know that The Yellow Wallpaper, written in 1892, was largely autobiographical, let us place the account of the heroine's (and Charlotte's) story in the social and historical context of that time. The Victorian wife in a middle and upper class marriage was placed on a pedestal, but the pedestal was firmly located in the home. Having a pale, non-working wife, who may or may not be in frail health, was considered a status symbol for the men of society. Charlotte's husband, like the overprotective but well-meaning husband in the story, was devoted to his wife. He encouraged Charlotte to get more rest and to exercise will power. He rejected any possibility of an emotional problem. The doctor that Gilman used as her model, was S. Weir Mitchell, a noted neurologist of the time. He dismissed Charlotte's situation as an inherited trait amongst Beecher women - "hysterical exhaustion." His cure, such as proves the undoing of the wife in The Yellow Wallpaper, was enforced inactivity, separation from family and friends, no mental stimulation and to never again put a pen to paper. Tonics (sedatives) were given. A depressant to a depressed person!

Attributing the term "hysteria" to most of the illnesses of middle and upper class women at that time was popularized by Freud and his followers. Lower class women were to be healthy workhorses, bred only to serve men and produce children. The root for the word "hysteria" is "hyster." It is Greek, meaning "womb." All female illnesses were considered to originate from her peculiar sex organs - Ergo, women were physically and mentally inferior. That is why women who indulged in educational pursuits became "hysterical" -

and overtaxed their brains.

Gilman observed that proper Victorian ladies were languid, pale, submissive, dependent emotionally and economically. While she savored fresh air and exercise, such as the woman in The Yellow Wallpaper, proper ladies were restricted by clothing and corsets, lulled into ennui and depressed by stale air and guarding against draughts.

The story describes the life of a middle class Victorian woman and her descent into dementia. The husband always speaks patronizingly and condescendingly to the patient and calls her "his blessed little goose." He also tells her that simple things like thinking and imagery are too much of a strain for her nervous weakness.

Like the woman in the nailed-down bed, Gilman protested to her husband that the cure was detrimental. She, too, wondered if the source of her illness might not be her husband and the constrictions he placed on her. Unlike the heroine, Charlotte did not go over the brink. In a moment of lucidity, she fled the confinement and left her husband. In the novel, the wife/patient speaks of laying there for hours trying to make a simple decision about a design on the wallpaper. For many years, Gilman couldn't even make a decision about whether or not to take a trolley, or to discipline herself to read a complete letter. While the woman found liberation in madness, Charlotte escaped the traditional roles and treatment and found her liberation in speaking and writing.

In Gilman's day, men could be both fathers and philosophers, but a mother was "safeguarding civiliation" and was not allowed a career.[9] The mystique of motherhood, the mythology of woman's

fulfillment through child care, made an accurate diagnosis of Charlotte's disorder impossible. There were countless women in Gilman's era who went into mental asylums and never came out because of the "insanity caused by childbirth."

Elaine R. Hedges' afterword in the 1973 Feminist Press edition of The Yellow Wallpaper is a perceptive critique of that novel. However, Hedges' comments on the author's style and life are those of an adulant teen toward an older role model. One of the few negative criticisms that Hedges allows herself is the statement that . . . "Polemical intent often made her fiction dry and clumsily didactic . . .". The critic does note the similarity between the heroines in Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper and Kate Chopin's The Awakening, published three years later. Hedges does remark on the rejection of the work and authors of both novels by their contemporaries.

Women and Economics, which she wrote in a marathon session of seven months and published in 1898 is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's most noted work. It was neither hysterical with a shrill feminism nor antimale in sentiment, yet gave an analysis of the situations in which women were living at the time. It gave social recognition to changes in Amerian society that had already taken place, rather than prophesying great and significant change in the future - much like Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique published 65 years later.

Gilman violated some of society's most rigidly held taboos in order to act in a way that was in harmony with her ideas. She wrote in the same manner. In Women and Economics she attacked, without apology, two of American society's most cherished insti-

tutions, the home and motherhood.

She said that the technological age had made the isolated home archaic and that motherhood alone was a primitive way to define a person's identity. She proposed that women become full, functioning members of society, rather than occupy the status of half-child, half-adult, which kept them uneducated, untrained for real work, and a vehicle for displaying the wealth of their husbands. Gilman was not anti-marriage as were some of the radicals of her day (Emma Goldman and Chrystal Eastman). She believed that the institution of marriage would be strengthened by the emancipation of the woman and her participation in an egalitarian arrangement between spouses. At the turn of the century Gilman was a conspicuous critic of American materialism and woman " . . . as the priestess of the temple of consumption." She also held that children were too precious a wealth for our future, to be allowed to be trained, reared and educated by unskilled, untrained mothers who had been told since time immemorial that they need only rely on their "divine maternal instincts." She proposed that trained, qualified women be charged with educating children. Her concept was similar to our present day pre-schools and kindergartens, though heretical and radical in her time.

Contemporary critiques of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's work were not located by this writer. The earliest commentary that was available was Carl Degler's oft-studied article: "Charlotte Perkins Gilman on the Theory and Practice of Feminism," published in 1956.[10] Degler edited the republication of Women and Economics in 1966. However, that edition was not available to this writer.

Degler's 1956 article is perceptive and well-balanced. Unlike the critiques written in recent years, he commented solely on Gilman's works - primarily those from 1898 through 1923 (her most productive and creative years).

Degler writes: "For all her exposure of the masculine influence molding our culture, Gilman was no uncritical or misantropic feminist." "There should be an end," she wrote, "to the bitterness of feeling which has arisen between the sexes in this century." Her evoluntionary approach was too meaningful for her to denigrate man's historic activities in behalf of civiliation. The economic dependence of women, she maintained, had been necessary so that man could forsake the role of hunter, fighter and destroyer, and become the builder of civilization. The imprisonment of women had acted as a "coiled spring" - its "intense stimulus" enabling man to move mountains. But, she emphasized, by the nineteenth century that stage in evolution was at an end: man alone could no longer advance civilization; the contribution of woman was required to continue the progress of humanity.

For a deeper understanding and appreciation of Gilman's Women and Economics, this writer strongly advises the reading of Degler's previously-mentioned critique - before and after the reading of the treatise.

Carol Ruth Berkins' article, "Private Woman, Public Woman: The Contradictions of Charlotte Perkins Gilman" in the 1979 anthology, Women of America - A History, examines the dichotomies that were the author and her works and the doubts that plagued her most of her life. Berkins not only brings a new perspective to Gilman's

works, but also affords the researcher an incisive psychological examination of the personna that was Gilman. Berkins includes three documents from the Radcliffe College Charlotte Perkins Gilman Collection. The poem "Two Callings" written in 1903 describes Gilman's thoughts on love and marriage prior to, and after her marriage to Houghton Gilman. The reader can clearly appreciate the differences in the author's sentiments. Charlotte had grown considerably from the greatly troubled housewife of The Yellow Wallpaper.

The second document is a 1911 editorial for Gilman's magazine The Forerunner. In it the author/publisher stated her purpose and philosophy.

> " . . . The need The Forerunner seeks to meet is not of a general and popular sort, but is no less real for all that: being the demand of a rather special group of people for clear expression of their rather special views.
>
> . . . Its view upon the Woman question is that which sees women as human beings, not merely struggling for freedom, privilege and power, but as heavily behind hand in their duty to the world; holding in their gift a mighty fund of Love and Service which we can no longer do without.
>
> It sees in Socialsim the natural evolution of our economic system; long since begun, now already introduced in many lines in varying

> degree, sure of ultimate adoption, and calling for intelligent study and recognition of every conscientious citizen . . ."

The third document offered is an excerpt from The Crux, a serialized story that appeared in a 1911 edition of The Forerunner.

> . . . Her work must be worthwhile. She felt the crushing cramp and lonliness (sic) of a young mind, really stronger than those about her, yet held in dumb subjection. She could not solace herself by loving them; her father would have none of it, and her mother had no use for what she called "sentiment." All her life Vivian had longed for more loving, both to give and take; but no one ever imagined it of her, she was so quiet and repressed in manner. The local opinion was that if a woman had a head, she could not have a heart; and as to having a body - it was indelicate to consider such a thing. . .[11]

Vivian was Charlotte! The wrenched, frustrated, lonely individual who did not know how to give or receive love - who dared not love or be loved for fear of rejection and failure. Only in her marriage to Houghton Gilman at 40 years of age, did Charlotte find the fulfillment of her longing and the resolvement of her excrutiating loneliness.

The previously mentioned The Forerunner contained scores of articles, poems and short stories, all written by Charlotte. The

seven volumes were written between 1909 and 1916.

In her autobiography, Gilman described the monthly magazine as equalling four books of 36,000 words per year. Each issue was comprised of one installment of a novel, also a book published serially, a short story, articles of various length, poems, verses, allegories, humor and nonsense, with book reviews and comment on current events.[12] She even wrote the advertisements.

Charlotte was a prolific writer. In the course of her busy, strenuous and often painful life, Gilman published six books of non-fiction, a full-length utopian novel, a volume of poetry, two volumes of fiction, countless articles, poems and short stories for scholarly periodicals, seven volumes of a monthly magazine and her autobiography that was published posthumously in 1935.[13] In addition, she delivered written and extemporaneous speeches for nearly thirty years.

In her seldom mentioned novel Herland which she serialized in her monthly magazine (1915) Gilman presented a feminist utopian environment. Reasonableness governed all. While The Yellow Wallpaper reflects a woman in torment, Herland shows a woman at play. For Gilman it was an expansion and refinement of the literary fantasies of her pre-teens. As in all of her works, Charlotte created a cohesive, integrated body of thought that combined feminism and socialism. In the novel and such articles as "Are Women Human Beings," she also records what society perceives to be masculine or feminine and the history of those attributes.

Her poem, "An Obstacle,"[14] synthesized Charlotte's consuming interest in meeting prejudice and obstacles head on, with reasoning,

firm conviction and action.

> . . . That she (woman) should concentrate all her human faculties upon the fulfillment of her feminine functions he (male) has held quite right and proper; that she should at any time wish to use them, not as a female, but as a human being, is to him monstrous . . .[15]

Also she wrote:

> Specialization has given us a thousand trades, arts, crafts and professions. Organization has multiplied our power myriad-fold. Invention and discovery have enriched and enlightened the world. Religions have changed. Governments have changed. Society evolves from age to age. All these are human processes. They belong to our race. They are common to male and female. They have no faintest connection with any sex distinction.[16]

Gilman wrote about every dimension of life in America:

> Warfare is not a social process but a social disease, freely admitted to be most characteristic of the male.[17]
>
> Motherhood for women and fatherhood for men are the only occupations decreed by Nature. . . .[18]
>
> This is the woman's century, the first chance for the mother of the world to rise to her

full place, her transcendent power to remake humanity, to rebuild the suffering world - and the world waits while she powders her nose . . .[19]

Only in dress, and almost wholly in the dress of women, is it possible to dictate to half the population as if they were a lot of hypnotized dummies . . .[20]

Alimony is the meanest money that is taken - by women . . . But a woman's health is often ruined - she is in no condition to earn her living - is urged. Very well. If a woman is really injured by her marriage, she should sue under the employer liability act. She should claim damages - not alimony.[21]

This inordinate demand for the life and time of a whole woman to keep half a dozen people fed, cleaned and waited on, keeps us in a degree of self-indulgence we should, by every step of social development, have long since outgrown.[22]

. . . parental duty is a law of nature. Filial duty is an invention of the patriarchs. Nowhere else in the whole animal kingdom is there found this sordid parentage.

Young people are the advance guard of civilization. To them belongs the splendid duty of leadership.[23]

Freud's writings: . . . solemn philosophical sex mania.[24]

A family unity which is bound together by a tablecloth is of questionable value.[25]

Marriage has risen and developed in social importance as the family has sunk and decreased . . .[26]

Our distinctions of sex are carried to such a degree as to be disadvantageous to our progress as individuals and as a race."[27]

Walter Lippman's analysis of the women's movement, Drift and Mastery, borrowed many of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's ideas. He wrote: "Housekeeping and baby-rearing are the two most primitive arts in the world . . . Almost in vain do women like Mrs. Gilman insist that the institution of the family is not dependent on keeping woman a drudge amidst housekeeping arrangements inherited from the early Egyptians."[28]

Charlotte was most prophetic when she wrote in her autobiography (p. 329-330):

The Great War (W.W.I)[29] has shown us, lit by that world conflagration, the deep, the wide, lasting vital difference between races. Race-consciousness is increasing rather than decreasing, it is rising and moving more portentuously than ever. (harbinger of the Civil Rights movement.) The stir among Africans (increased clamor and fight for independence from colonial powers), the up-

> rising in India (and its eventual independence from Britain), the sudden emergence of Japan (one of the prime causes of W.W.II), the huge efforts toward a more conscious national power in China (portends of the Cultural Revolution and eventual "de-communization" of that country), China with her mighty intellect and with immeasurable resources, all this does not bear out the innocent claim of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" (French Revolutionary clarion), which visualizes a world of brothers."

Gilman, at all times, espoused the humanist belief - yet, she was not so rigid as to fail to incorporate some of Adam Smith's utilitarianism.

> With all its lamentable accompaniement of license and misbehavior, an intelligent limitation of a population to the resources of a country is one of the most essential requirements for any hope of world peace.

The foregoing was written in her autobiography (p. 330).

Chapter XX of The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman is entitled: Home. It is a collection of thoughts on subjects from the polyglot of large cities, to the need for a new, easily understood religion that would fill the soul with hope and purpose of earthly human happiness, instead of a morbid anxiety for a posthumous hypothesis of personal immortality.

Charlotte's vision was that as women grow, losing nothing that is essential to their womaness, but adding qualities of humaness, " . . . they will gradually rear a new race of men, men with minds large enough to see in human beings something besides males and females." Gilman was first and foremost a humanist. She perceived the lowly status of women to be a loss to humanity. Her cosmic views envisioned a society where men and women were economically and socially independent - where both worked in a shared equality for the betterment of society (humankind).

The suffragist, Carrie Chapman Catt, placed Charlotte Perkins Gilman at the head of her list of America's dozen greatest women: in her time she was certainly the leading intellectual of the woman's movement in the United States. She was one of those individuals who in Catt's words, "so constituted as not to fit existing conditions" and "in sharp and painful consciousness . . . cry out against them" (Women and Economics p. 80).[30] Her books are in the tradition of thinkers like Comte, Bentham, Bellamy and Ward, who idealistically sought to re-arrange human society along sharply rational lines.

Not surprisingly, Rita this is well written and thought out. At first I thought you were "reading" your talk, but the second half of the paper adds to that original info. beautifully. Good job and good luck!

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Notes

1. Alice Rossi, "The Militant Madonna: Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935)." The Feminist Papers: from Adams to de Beauvoir, p. 566.

2. Judith Nies, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman," Seven Women: Portraits from the American Radical Tradition, p. 144.

3. Charlotte Gilman, The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, p. 5, thereafter, The Living.

4. Nies, p. 130.

5. Ibid, p. 132.

6. Ibid, p. 138.

7. The full title given by Charlotte Perkins Stetson was: Women and Economics. A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution, thereafter, Women and Economics.

8. Nies, p. 145. Oddly enough in the American Women: Images and Realities edition of The Living, published by Arno Press in 1972, Gilman's suicide note is mentioned posthumously on page 335 thusly:

> [On August 17, 1935, Mrs. Gilman fulfilled her intention to end her life as her malady advanced. The letter, left by her, was a part of the text of this final chapter of her autobiography, beginning: "Human life consists in mutual service," and ending, "I have preferred chloroform to cancer."]

However, Gilman had craftily included it in Chapter XXI of her autobiography - written ten years after the book and her final chapter.

9. Carl N. Degler, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman on the Theory and Practice of Feminism," The American Quarterly, VIII (Spring 1956) 21-39 has the following endnote:

> "There is no real reason," she argued, "why women should not be women, wives and mothers, and also members of society, performing that social service which is our first duty as human beings." Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Social Darwinism," American Journal of

Sociology, (March 1907), 714. "Motherhood," she said elsewhere, " - if anything, is women's business." Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Good Tidings of Women - the World's Best Hope," Women's Home Companion (February 1908), 5.

10. Degler, same cite as note 9.

11. All direct quotes and documents are taken from the Carol Ruth Berkin article: "Private Woman, Public Woman: The Contradictions of Charlotte Perkins Gilman". Women of America: A History (1979).

12. Gilman, pp. 304-305.

13. Degler, note 6.

14. Poem found on page xxxiii of the Foreword to Gilman's The Living. The lengthy Foreword is written by Zona Gale. (1972).

15. Gilman "Are Women Human Beings?" (1912). Harper's Weekly, Vol. 56 (May 25, 1912). Reprinted in Woman and Womanhood in America, edited by Ronald W. Hogeland, (1973). pp. 133-135.

16. Gilman, same cite as note 15.

17. _____, same cite as note 15.

18. Degler. According to his notes number 30 and 62, this quote was obtained from Gilman's The Man-Made World or, Our Androcentric Culture (New York: Charlton Company, 1911) p. 84.

19. Gilman. The Living. p. 331.

20. June Sochen. Herstory: A Record of the American Woman's Past. (Sherman Oaks, California: Alfred Publishing Co., 1981) p. 214. The quote was taken from Gilman's critique on ladies fashion, written in 1915 for her magazine The Forerunner.

21. Ibid, p. 216 from Gilman's March 1912 issue of The Forerunner.

22. Ibid, p. 192.

23. Ibid, p. 233 from Gilman's "What Young People are For," The Forerunner, III (January 1912).

24. Ibid, p. 259.

25. Rossi, p. 593.

26. Ibid, p. 592.

27. Gilman. Same cite as note 15.

28. Nies, p. 144.

29. All parentheticals in this quotation are mine.

30. The original cite for this quote can be found in Mary Gray Peck's Carrie Chapman Catt (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1944), p. 454-455. However, this writer located the cite in multi-volume encyclopedia: Women in American History. Unfortunately, all other bibliographic data has been lost.

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